

Growing In Agriculture

Fallen, Not Forgotten

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A column by Lucas Lentsch, Secretary of Agriculture

As we enjoy the August weather and all of our summer activities, let us also remember the individuals who face the dangers of nature that hot and dry conditions can create.

Countless firefighters and first responders put their lives on the line to ensure we remain safe to enjoy our summer months.

We were all recently reminded of the incredible risks our firefighters face each and every day. On July 31st, the U.S. Forest Service in South Dakota lost firefighter Dave Ruhl while he was assisting in fighting the Frog Fire in Alturas, California. Dave, a member of the Rapid City community, left behind a wife and two children, along with other family members and friends, in order to protect other families from harm.

Here in the Department, we have not remained untouched by tragedies like these. The Wildland Fire Division within the South Dakota Department of Agriculture employs many firefighters who join their counterparts in other local, state and federal agencies to respond to incidents and to help fight fires across the country and even Canada. In 2011, Wildland Firefighter Trampus Haskvitz from Hot Springs died in the line of duty fighting the Coal Canyon Fire near Edgemont.

It is important that we recognize the sacrifices firefighters make and remember those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The Wildland Firefighter Foundation serves as a way to honor those who have been injured or killed while protecting our land, homes and property by providing financial assistance to their families. For more information about the foundation, go to <http://www.wffoundation.org/> or call 208-336-2996.

In rural areas where full time emergency personnel are often not available, volunteer roles are critically important. Almost a year ago, my home community in Marshall County said goodbye to a great friend, Donald A. "Bucko" Monsen, who died as the result of a traffic accident. Bucko was a fixture in the community and a true public servant. He served as both a volunteer first responder for Britton and a volunteer firefighter in the Veblen area.

We are all fortunate to have individuals like Dave, Trampus and Bucko looking out for us. The next time you see a firefighter or first responder, take a moment to say "thank you" for their willingness to put their own life on the line in service to our communities.

To our fallen, but not forgotten heroes, may you rest in peace.

